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ABSTRACT

This document addresses the problem faced by stress management programs in their attempts to increase self-awareness of stress response patterns and sources of stress. Drawbacks to the techniques of daily diaries and stress logs are noted and the use of computer-analyzed stress episode cards as a self-awareness feedback technique is explained. The procedure used to complete the cards after self-defined stressful events is described and the use of weekly individual computer printouts which contain an analysis and organization of card information is discussed. The popularity of stress-episode cards is briefly reviewed, and sample cards are provided, accompanied by instructions for card completion and a sample printout of a stress-episodes analysis. (NRB)

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COMPUTER ANALYZED STRESS-EPISODE CARDS: A SELF-AWARENESS FEEDBACK TECHNIQUE

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COMPUTER ANALYZED STRESS-EPISODE CARDS: A SELF-AWARENESS FEEDBACK TECHNIQUE

Craig E. Daniels University of Hartford EPA April 24, 1981

ABSTRACT

Computer analyzed stress-episode cards provide a simple effective procedure for increasing self-awareness of stress response patterns and sources of stress. Printed 3" x 5" cards are completed following self defined stressful episodes, computer scored and a printout consisting of the data plus a series of questions returned to each person.

Introduction - The first major goal of any stress management program is to increase self awareness of stress response patterns and sources of stress. Traditionally, this is accomplished by having individuals complete daily diaries or stress logs, i.e., writing summaries at the end of the day or maintaining logs for each half-hour block of time, etc. However, end of the day diaries suffer from halo effects and selective remembering while most persons find maintaining detailed daily activity logs or writing summaries of stressful episodes sufficiently tedious that compliance tends to be very low.

A second problem inherent in chronological logs and diaries lies in the analysis of the information. Since participants often have limited experience in looking for patterns in a set of data, it is difficult for them to derive much useful information from their diaries on their own.

Procedure - The stress-episode cards attempt to remedy both these problems by having subjects complete 3" x 5" printed cards as soon as possible after each self defined stressful episode. These cards require approximately 30 seconds to complete and elicit information about the magnitude of the stressful episode, associated feelings and body responses, and situational variables (i.e., location, persons involved, activity).

The stress-card procedure facilitates participant efforts to find patterns in the data by computer analyzing the information on the cards and organizing it in a number of simple presentation formats (e.g. magnitude of the episode and feelings by time of day, frequency of each body response over all episodes). Each of these formats is accompanied by a series of specific questions (e.g. "Do your stressful episodes tend to cluster at certain times of the day?" or "Do your stressful episodes tend to occur mostly on certain days of the week?") Individual computer printouts are generated and given to each person on a weekly basis and can either include just the data from the previous week or all the data to date.

Results - The above procedure has been used as part of a number of stress management training programs including groups of students, groups of insurance company executives and groups of state employees. Content and format of these programs varied considerably, however, all programs were evaluated using both open ended questions (e.g. "Which techniques or procedures in the program did you personally find most useful?") and rating scale for each of the program components. The stress-episode cards are very popular with participants, especially Type A's since:

(1) the cards are fast to complete (Type A's tend to equate fast with good).

(2) participants like the idea of individual computer printouts of their own data which they keep.

(3) participants report that the printouts are interesting to read, easy to interpret and lead to positive behavior change.

Stress-Episode Card

(1-4) ID #_____ (6-13) day of wk. ____ date_____ time_____ AM PM

(15) HOW STRESSFUL WAS THE EPISODE (circle #)	*SLIGHTLY*	*MODERATELY*	*VERY*	*EXTREMELY*
	1	2	3	4

(16) HOW DID YOU FEEL DURING THE EPISODE *(check only one)*

____ annoyed, impatient or angry (A)
____ disappointed (D)
____ guilty (G)
____ happy, hopeful, playful or joyful (H)
____ rushed, hassled or overstimulated (R)
____ sad or depressed (S)
____ helpless or used (U)
____ tense, anxious or panicked (X)

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complete other side

How did your body respond *(check all that are applicable)*

____ rapid pulse (17)
____ heart pounding (18)
____ cold hands or feet (19)
____ face hot or flushed (20)
____ stomach tightens/churns (21)
____ acid stomach/indigestion (22)
____ nausea (23)
____ racing thoughts or inability to concentrate (24)
____ shortness of breath or hyperventilation (25)
____ dry mouth or very thirsty (26)
____ increased perspiration (27)
____ need to urinate (28)
____ clenched jaw/gritted teeth (29)
____ tense arms/hands or trembling hands/fingers (30)
____ tense neck or shoulders (31)
____ difficulty sitting still (32)

(33) other (specify) _____

(35-46) Location

(48-59) Persons involved

(61-80) Action preceding & during

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING STRESS-EPISODE CARDS

HOW STRESSFUL WAS THE EPISODE?

SINCE THIS IS A HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE QUESTION, IT IS DIFFICULT TO WRITE DEFINITIONS FOR *slightly, moderately, very and extremely stressful* WHICH WILL MEAN THE SAME THING TO EACH PERSON. TRY, HOWEVER, TO BE AS CONSISTENT AS POSSIBLE IN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION AND USE THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES TO HELP.

slightly - MILD SHORT-LIVED STRESS; A FLEETING EXPERIENCE LIKE THE RIPPLE ON A LAKE PRODUCED BY A SUMMER BREEZE, E.G. PASSING ANNOYANCE, A PLEASANT DAYDREAM, MILD FLEETING ANXIETY OR GUILT.

moderately - MORE INTENSE AND/OR LONGER LASTING STRESS; CHOPPY WATER PRODUCED BY A BRISK BREEZE.

very - VERY AROUSED OR STRESSED; AN OBSERVER WOULD USUALLY BE ABLE TO TELL THAT YOUR WERE VERY ANGRY, DEPRESSED, ELATED, ETC. OR IF YOU ARE MAINTAINING A CALM EXTERIOR YOU ARE SEETHING INSIDE. LIKE A SUMMER STORM, THE EPISODE MAY BE RELATIVELY SHORT LIVED AND INTENSE OR IT MAY LAST FOR A CONSIDERABLE TIME. IF YOU ARE STILL AROUSED AFTER HALF AN HOUR, COMPLETE A SECOND STRESS-EPISODE CARD.

extremely - UNUSUALLY INTENSE OR EXTREME STRESS, E.G. RAGING ANGER, NUMBING FEAR, TRANSPORTING ECSTASY, ET. AL.

HOW DID YOU FEEL DURING THE EPISODE?

FEELINGS DURING AND IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING STRESS PRODUCING SITUATIONS ARE VALUABLE NOT ONLY WHEN LOOKING FOR PATTERNS AMONG THE EPISODES BUT ALSO FOR SUGGESTING COPING STRATEGIES. IN ADDITION TO THE FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH DISTRESS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BECOME AWARE OF HOW OFTEN YOU FEEL *HAPPY, JOYFUL OR PLAYFUL* AND THE SITUATIONS WHICH LEAD TO THESE *eustress* FEELINGS.

HOW DID YOUR BODY RESPOND?

IN A PREVIOUS SECTION YOU IMAGINED A STRESSFUL SITUATION AND RECORDED HOW YOUR BODY WOULD RESPOND. THE STRESS-EPISODE CARDS PROVIDE A MORE VALID MEASURE OF YOUR STRESS PATTERN SINCE IT IS MEASURED ACROSS SEVERAL DIFFERENT SITUATIONS OCCURRING OVER A PERIOD OF TIME.

LOCATION PERSONS INVOLVED ACTION PRECEDING & DURING

THIS FINAL SECTION IS EXTREMELY USEFUL IN SHOWING PATTERNS AMONG THE STRESSFUL EPISODES AND IN UNDERSTANDING THE ASPECTS OF THE SITUATIONS WHICH ARE "TRIGGERING" THE STRESS RESPONSE. IF THE CARDS ARE BEING COMPUTER-SCORED IT IS IMPORTANT TO CODE AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE USING ONLY ONE LETTER OR NUMBER PER BOX. USE ABBREVIATIONS LIBERALLY, REFER TO PEOPLE BY INITIALS. DO NOT ADD BOXES!

ANALYSIS OF STRESS-EPISODES

FOR Z 0

DURING THE PERIOD 4/ 1/81 TO 4/11/81

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TABLE I TIME OF OCCURRENCE, STRESS MAGNITUDE AND FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH STRESS

STRESS MAGNITUDE: (1) SLIGHTLY STRESSFUL (2) MODERATELY STRESSFUL (3) VERY STRESSFUL (4) EXTREMELY STRESSFUL

FEELINGS DURING EPISODE: (A) ANNOYED, IMPATIENT, ANGRY (D) DISAPPOINTED (G) GUILTY (H) HAPPY,HOPEFUL,PLAYFUL,JOYFUL
(R) RUSHED, HASSLED, OVERSTIM (S) SAD, DEPRESSED (U) HELPLESS, USED (X) ANXIOUS, TENSE, PANICKED

TIME OF OCCURRENCE

DATE			A M										NOON												P M												MIDNITE
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12											
W	4	1								2A																											
W	4	1											3U																								
TH	4	2								2A										2H																	
F	4	3									2R											1G															
F	4	3											3R																								
SA	4	4																				4A															
SU	4	5																										2H									
M	4	6											1U																								
												2X																									
T	4	7																		3A																	
W	4	8									2X																										
												3X																									
TH	4	9														1A																					
																				2D																	
TH	4	9																		1G																	
F	4	10																																	2H		
												2A																									
SA	4	11											1R																								
																1G																					

EXAMINE TABLE I AND WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS TO THE QUESTIONS IN THE SPACES BELOW.

1-WHAT TIME(S) AND/OR DAY(S) OF THE WEEK DO YOUR STRESS-EPISODES OCCUR MOST FREQUENTLY?

2-DO CERTAIN STRESS FEELINGS OCCUR MORE AT ONE TIME OF DAY OR ON ONE DAY OF THE WEEK AND OTHER FEELINGS AT OTHER TIMES/DAYS?

TABLE II NUMBER OF STRESS-EPISODES OF EACH MAGNITUDE

MAGNITUDE	NUMBER
(1) SLIGHTLY STRESSFUL	6
(2) MODERATELY STRESSFUL	10
(3) VERY STRESSFUL	4
(4) EXTREMELY STRESSFUL	1
TOTAL EPISODES	21

THE AVERAGE MAGNITUDE OF THESE 21 EPISODES IS 2.0

THE 21 EPISODES OCCURRED OVER A PERIOD OF 11 DAYS
FOR AN AVERAGE NUMBER OF 1.9 EPISODES PER DAY

3-COMPARE THE INFORMATION ON STRESS-EPISODES FOR THIS PERIOD WITH THE INFORMATION FROM PREVIOUS PRINTOUTS.
ARE THE AVERAGE MAGNITUDE AND AVERAGE NUMBER OF STRESS-EPISODES HIGHER OR LOWER?
WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS IN THE SPACE BELOW.

TABLE III NUMBER AND MAGNITUDE OF STRESSFUL EPISODES FOR EACH FEELING

FEELING	NUMBER/MAGNITUDE OF EPISODES
(A) ANNOYED, IMPATIENT, ANGRY	2 2 4 3 1 2
(D) DISAPPOINTED	2
(G) GUILTY	1 1 1
(H) HAPPY,HOPEFUL,PLAYFUL,JOYFUL	2 2 2
(R) RUSHED, HASSLED, OVERSTIM	2 3 1
(S) SAD, DEPRESSED	
(U) HELPLESS, USED	3 1
(X) ANXIOUS, TENSE, PANICKED	2 2 3

EXAMINE TABLE III. WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN THE SPACES BELOW.

4-WHAT FEELING(S) IS MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR STRESS-EPISODES?

5-WHAT FEELING(S) IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE STRESS-EPISODES HAVING THE HIGHEST MAGNITUDE?

6-HOW OFTEN DID YOU REPORT HAPPY, HOPEFUL, PLAYFUL OR JOYFUL EPISODES?
COMPARE THIS NUMBER WITH THE NUMBER OF NEGATIVE STRESS-EPISODES YOU REPORTED.

TABLE IV FREQUENCY OF INDIVIDUAL BODY RESPONSES DURING STRESS-EPISODES

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY
RAPID PULSE	9
HEART POUNDING	11
COLD HANDS OR FEET	7
FACE HOT OR FLUSHED	4
STOMACH TIGHTEN/CHURN	8
ACID STOMACH/INDIGESTION	4
NAUSEA	1
RACING THOUGHTS/INAB CON	9
SHORT BREATH/HYPER VENT	3
DRY MOUTH/VERY THIRSTY	6
INCREASED PERSPERATION	5
NEED TO URINATE	2
CLENCH JAW/GRIT TEETH	7
TENSE/TREMBLE ARMS/HANDS	1
TENSE NECK OR SHOULDERS	4
DIFF. SIT STILL	8
OTHER	1

7-EXAMINE TABLE IV.
HOW DOES YOUR BODY RESPOND MOST FREQUENTLY TO STRESS?
WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS IN THE SPACE BELOW.

TABLE V DAY, TIME, LOCATION, PERSONS INVOLVED AND ACTION FOR EACH STRESSFUL EPISODE

DAY	TIME	LOCATION	PERSONS INVOLVED	ACTION PRECEEDING,DURING
W	8:15 AM	CAR	ALONE	TRAFFIC TIEUP LATE
W	11:30 AM	OFFICE	BOSS	NOT USING MY PROPOSL
W	5:15 PM	HOME	WIFE	SON GOT SCHOLARSHIP
TH	8:30 AM	CAR	ALONE	TRAFFIC JAM LATE
TH	7:00 PM	HOME	SON	FORGOT GROCERIES
F	9:00 AM	OFFICE	AR-JB	NOT READY FOR MTG
F	11:45 AM	OFFICE	SECRETARY	OVERDUE MAR REPORT
F	6:30 PM	KITCHEN	WIFE	ARGUEMENT OVER FOODS
SA	9:15 PM	RESTAURANT	AL BR M & J	GD FOOD/CONVERSATION
SU	11:30 AM	HOME	ALONE	CLEANING/CHORES
M	10:45 AM	OFFICE	GROUP	HEARD JS GOT FIRED
M	5:45 PM	CAR	ALONE	TRAFFIC ACCIDENT
T	9:00 AM	AT DESK	ALONE	WORRYING ABOUT CAR
W	10:30 AM	AUDITORIUM	LARGE CROWD	WAITING TO SPEAK
W	2:00 PM	BANK	---	LONG LINE TO CASH CK
TH	5:45 PM	FAMILY RM	YOUNGER SON	TROUBLE AT SCHOOL
TH	6:15 PM	FAMILY RM	ALONE	THINKING ABOUT SON
TH	11:30 PM	BEDROOM	WIFE	SEX
F	9:45 AM	OFFICE	SECRETARY	CALLED IN SICK
F	11:30 AM	WAY TO AIRPT	JB	LATE TO MEET CLIENT
SA	2:15 PM	HOME	MOTHER	PHONE CALL

EXAMINE TABLE V AND WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN THE SPACE BELOW

8-IN WHAT LOCATION(S) DO YOUR STRESS-EPISODES TEND TO OCCUR MOST FREQUENTLY?

9-WHAT PERSON(S) TEND TO BE INVOLVED MOST FREQUENTLY?

10-WHAT ACTION TENDS TO BE TAKING PLACE MOST FREQUENTLY IMMEDIATELY PRECEEDING/DURING THE STRESS-EPISODES?

11-ON THE BASIS OF YOUR CONCLUSIONS, SELECT A TARGET BEHAVIOR THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TRY AND REDUCE/INCREASE DURING THE NEXT PERIOD. YOUR TARGET BEHAVIOR COULD FOCUS ON FEELINGS, BODY RESPONSES, OR PARTICULAR SITUATIONS INVOLVING KEY PERSONS, LOCATIONS OR ACTIONS. WRITE THE TARGET BEHAVIOR(S) YOU SELECT IN THE SPACE BELOW.

12-THINK ABOUT STRATEGIES TO REDUCE /INCREASE YOUR TARGET BEHAVIOR(S). WRITE DOWN ANY IDEAS YOU HAVE IN THE SPACE BELOW. BEFORE YOU DEVELOP ANY SINGLE IDEA TRY AND THINK OF AS MANY DIFFERENT STRATEGIES AS YOU CAN.

13-WHAT KINDS OF PROBLEMS ARE YOU LIKELY TO HAVE IN MODIFYING YOUR TARGET BEHAVIORS? FIRST LIST PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF OTHERS, THEN THE PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF YOURSELF, THEN THE PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION OR SETTING. BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE. SOME PEOPLE FIND IT USEFUL TO CLOSE THEIR EYES AND IMAGINE THEMSELVES TRYING TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR WHILE ANSWERING THIS QUESTION.

PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF OTHERS:

PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF SELF:

PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION/SETTING:

14-NOW THAT YOU HAVE ANTICIPATED SOME POSSIBLE PROBLEMS, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE EACH OF THESE PROBLEMS? BESPECIFIC AND DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE POSSIBLE REWARDS YOU CAN GIV YOURSELF FOR HAVING TRIED OR SUCCEEDED.

EXAMINE YOUR LAST PRINTOUT AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUES"IONS.

15-WHAT TARGET BEHAVIOR DID YOU ATTEMPT TO MODIFY?

WHAT STRATEGY DID YOU TRY?

HOW WELL DID IT WORK?

16-SELECT ONE STRATEGY WHICH YOU WILL USE TO REDUCE/INCREASE YOUR TARGET BEHAVIOR DURING THE NEXT WEEK.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
X X
X REMEMBER TO COMPLETE A STRESS-EPISODE CARD FOLLOWING EACH POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE STRESS-EXPERIENCE. X
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX